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HOUSE BILL 2435
By Whitson

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 68, relative to establishing the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program of Tennessee. This act appropriates a sum sufficient to fund the administration and operation of the program herein established for fiscal year 1998-1999.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

WHEREAS, health care reform is occurring at the state and national levels that promotes an emphasis on primary care; and

WHEREAS, many rural and urban communities within Tennessee lack access to adequate health care; and

WHEREAS, difficulties in the recruitment and retention of health care professionals to rural and urban underserved communities affects the viability, accessibility and quality of health care in these communities; and

WHEREAS, decentralized, community-academic partnerships have been proven effective in generating solutions to improve the availability, accessibility and quality of health care in rural and urban underserved communities; and

WHEREAS, minority and underprivileged individuals are poorly represented in the health professions workforce and experience has proven that such individuals trained as health care professionals are more likely to choose to practice in their communities of origin; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

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SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 68, Chapter 1, is amended by adding Sections 2-15 inclusive of this act as a new, appropriately designated part.

SECTION 2. The general assembly declares that the activities and program specified in this act have been proven effective in Tennessee and the nation as means to recruit individuals from rural and underserved communities to enter primary health care professions. These activities and programs will also increase the number of primary health care professionals who choose to practice and continue practicing in rural and underserved communities to enter primary health care professions. By increasing the number of primary health care professionals and retaining existing practitioners in rural and underserved communities, the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program of Tennessee will improve the availability, accessibility and quality of health care in these communities. Improved health among Tennessee's rural and underserved community residents will contribute to more viable and economically productive communities.

SECTION 3. There is hereby established the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Program of Tennessee. For administration purposes only, the AHEC program shall be attached to the Tennessee department of health. The mission of the AHEC program shall be to use educational interventions through community-academic partnerships. The AHEC program shall accomplish this mission by promoting wellness, disease prevention, primary care and the recruitment of minority and underprivileged individuals into health care professions.

SECTION 4. The mission of the AHEC Program of Tennessee shall be accomplished by:

- (1) Enhancement of programs to recruit primary, secondary and postsecondary students into primary health care professions; and
- (2) Enhancement of programs designed to recruit health professions students and primary care medical residents to practice primary care in rural and underserved communities in Tennessee; and

(3) Development of educational programs designed to support practicing health care professionals in rural and urban underserved communities.

SECTION 5.

(a) In order to effectuate the provisions of Sections 3 and 4, East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College, and the University of Tennessee-Memphis shall be charged to initiate or further develop programs designed below through individual AHEC programs inclusive of existing centers.

(b) For the purposes of Section 5(a), East Tennessee State University shall be responsible for the AHEC Program in the eastern grand division except for counties served by the Chattanooga AHEC; Meharry Medical College shall be responsible for the AHEC program in the middle grand division and the counties served by their Chattanooga AHEC; and the University of Tennessee-Memphis shall be responsible for the AHEC program in the western grand division.

SECTION 6. The AHEC programs at East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College and the University of Tennessee-Memphis shall also develop and implement programs designed to interest the youth of Tennessee in entering primary health care professions; such programs may include, but shall not be limited to health fairs, mentoring programs, field experiences, and enrichment activities.

SECTION 7.

(a) In order to effectuate the provisions of Section 4(2), the AHEC programs at East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College, and the University of Tennessee-Memphis may maintain and enhance existing programs and develop new community-based education and training programs for health professions students and primary care medical residents in rural and urban underserved communities throughout Tennessee. Students from non-Tennessee institutions may also participate in such training programs on an at-cost basis and based upon the availability of spaces; provided, however, no student from a Tennessee institution shall be displaced from participation in such programs by the participation of an out-of-state student.

(b) To promote an increasing number of medical school graduates to enter the primary care specialties of family medicine, general internal medicine, obstetrics/gynecology and general pediatrics and to practice in rural and underserved communities of Tennessee. The three (3) institutions receiving funding from this act shall be required to place their medical students in AHEC-sponsored preceptorships with a primary care physician during each student's academic program. Such preceptorships may commence no later than the 1998-1999 academic year. Development of the above-described AHEC preceptorships shall be contingent upon the appropriation of adequate resources to fund the preceptorship experiences.

(c) To ensure the health profession students and primary care medical residents receive quality training experiences in rural and urban underserved communities, the AHEC programs at East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College and the University of Tennessee-Memphis shall recruit, train and provide professional support for community-based faculty.

(d) To promote health profession students and primary care medical residents interest in practicing in rural and underserved communities, individuals participating in such field experiences shall be eligible for reimbursement for travel expenses and living expenses actually incurred as a result of their participation in such field experiences. All such reimbursements for travel expenses and living expenses shall be in accordance with the comprehensive state travel regulations. The AHEC programs at East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College and the University of Tennessee-Memphis shall be responsible for administering all eligible health professions students and primary care medical residents field experiences funded by this act. This activity is contingent upon full funding of this legislation.

(e) In response to the changing health care systems in Tennessee and the nation that increasingly utilize multidisciplinary team approaches to health care delivery, the AHEC

program at East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College, and the University of Tennessee-Memphis shall promote multidisciplinary training of health professions students and medical residents in AHEC-supported activities.

SECTION 8.

(a) In order to effectuate the provisions of Section 4(B), the AHEC programs at East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College, and the University of Tennessee-Memphis shall develop and present professional development programs that address the local needs of primary health care professionals in rural and urban underserved communities in Tennessee. The purpose of professional development programs is to improve the health status of Tennesseans in rural and underserved communities by promoting wellness, primary care, disease prevention and quality health care delivery.

(b) Because quality health care delivery is dependent upon health care professionals timely access to information about the latest medical and health care discoveries, and because the isolation and difficulties associated with practicing in rural and urban underserved communities limits health care professionals access to information about the latest discoveries in their fields, the AHEC programs at East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College, and the University of Tennessee-Memphis may develop and enhance existing information dissemination systems. These information dissemination systems shall use appropriate technologies, including telecommunications technologies, to ensure that health care professionals in rural and urban underserved communities have timely access to the latest medical and health care discoveries.

SECTION 9. To promote wellness and reduce health care cost in Tennessee's rural and urban underserved communities, the AHEC programs at East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College, and the University of Tennessee-Memphis shall develop consumer

health promotion programs. The consumer education programs shall be thoroughly integrated with the AHEC's educational programs and targeted at health professions students, primary care medical residents and practicing health care professionals.

SECTION 10. The AHEC programs at East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College, and the University of Tennessee-Memphis shall individually report to the department of health on an annual basis relative to the statutory mission of the AHEC program and the progress such programs have made in fulfilling such mission.

SECTION 11. The activities and programs authorized by this act shall not duplicate other services, programs or activities provided by any department, board, commission or other governmental authority or entity of government.

SECTION 12. Any income generated as a result of programs or activities authorized by the provisions of this act shall not revert to the general fund at the end of the fiscal year, but shall be maintained by the individual AHEC programs at East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College and the University of Tennessee-Memphis and shall be reinvested to further the mission of the programs as stated in this act.

SECTION 13.

(a) There is hereby appropriated the sum of one million six hundred thousand dollars (\$1,600,000) to fund the Area Health Education Center Program of Tennessee for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1998.

(b) The appropriation provided for in subsection (a) to fund the AHEC Program of Tennessee for the fiscal year 1999 and all successive years shall be allocated to East Tennessee State University, the University of Tennessee-Memphis and Meharry Medical College as follows:

(1) Four Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$400,000) to East Tennessee State University for the East Tennessee grand division for counties served by the Chattanooga AHEC.

(2) Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000) to the University of Tennessee-Memphis for the West Tennessee grand division.

(3) Seven Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$700,000) to Meharry Medical College for the Middle Tennessee grand division and counties served by the Chattanooga AHEC.

SECTION 14. The commissioner of health is authorized to promulgate rules and regulations to effectuate the purpose of this act. All such rules and regulations shall be promulgated in accordance with the provisions of Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4, Chapter 5.

SECTION 15. For the purposes of promulgating rules and regulations, this act shall take effect upon becoming law, the public welfare requiring it. For all other purposes this act shall take effect July 1, 1998.